C MAR 1970

STATINTL

Laos Raids Feed Flames of War, Soviet Press Says; Laird Derided

Moscow—(UPI)—The Soviet press warned yesterday that U. S. air raids in Laos "are feeding the flames of war in Southeast Asia."

There was no Moscow response to President Nixon's plea for Russian help in scaling down the fighting.

An article in the weekly newspaper of the Soviet Journalists Union, Life Abroad, derided Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird for reportedly saying that U. S. air operations in Laos were necessary because of Laos' proximity to North and South Vietnam.

It said Laird "thus wants one crime directed against peace and security to justify others."

Expansion Charged

"Facts show that Washington's present course in southeast Asia as well as in the Far East and the Pacific is aimed at extending U. S. expansion in key locations of this wide region," the Moscow newspaper said.

It charged that the United States was "seeking to strangle the patriotic forces in Laos" and said American policy "keeps a whole army of Pentagon and CIA advisers there in violation of the Geneva agreements."

"Since there is no end in sight to the Vietnam war, American military may turn the entire Southeast Asia region into an area of aggression," the newspaper said.

Pravda Plays Up Dissent

Pravda, the official newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party, gave prominent display to Washington reports citing criticism of U. S. moves in Laos by Sens. George McGovern (D-SD) and J. William Fulbright (D-Ark).

The Soviet Union has special diplomatic responsibility and authority in Laos in its capacity as co-chairman, with Britain, of the 1962 Geneva Conference which sought to establish Laos as a neutral state.

In his policy statement Friday President Nixon said he had asked both British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Soviet Premier Alexei N. Kosygin to open diplomatic channels aimed at ending the war in Laos.

Diplomatic sources in London said yesterday that Wilson was studying the letter over the weekend.